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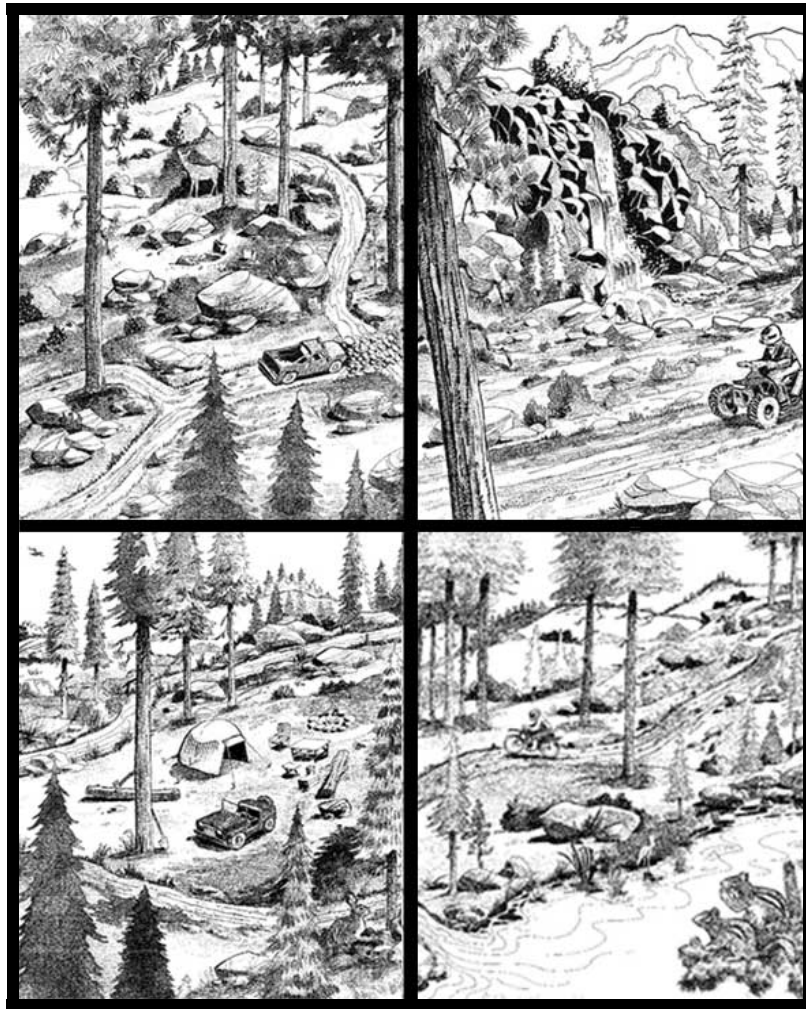
Sierra National
Forest

R5-MB-190
April 2009



Travel Management

Draft Environmental Impact Statement



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Travel Management EIS

Draft Environmental Impact Statement

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Abstract: This Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) describes the environmental effects of a proposal by the Sierra National Forest (SNF) to: 1. Prohibit motor vehicle travel off designated National Forest Transportation System (NFTS) roads, trails and areas by the public except as allowed by permit or other authorization. 2. Add 40 miles of existing unauthorized routes (with proposed season of use) to the current system of National Forest Transportation System (NFTS) trails and 6 miles to the current system of NFTS roads and permanently convert 91 miles of NFTS roads to NFTS trails 3. Add one area, totaling 6 acres, where use of motor vehicles by the public would be allowed anywhere within that area. 4. Allow non-highway legal vehicle use on approximately 91 miles of existing NFTS roads where such use is currently prohibited and prohibit all vehicle use on 204 miles of existing NFTS roads (see Chapter 2 description of Alternative 2 for an explanation of why the mileage totals have changed since the publication of the Notice of Intent in September 2007). And 5; this DEIS proposes a non-significant Forest Plan (LRMP) amendment to designate two trail additions to the NFTS (0.77 miles) within the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class Semi-Primitive, Non-Motorized area as defined in the SNF Forest Plan (LRMP). These actions are needed in order to implement the 2005 Travel Management Rule (36 CFR Part 261) while providing for a diversity of motor vehicle recreation opportunities and providing motorized access to dispersed recreation opportunities on the SNF. The DEIS discloses environmental impacts associated with the proposed action, a no action alternative and three additional action alternatives developed in response to issues raised by the public. Maps of each alternative can be found in Appendix K.

Public Comment: It is important that reviewers provide their comments at such times and in such a way that they are useful to the Agency's preparation of the EIS. Therefore, comments should be provided prior to the close of the comment period and should clearly articulate the reviewer's concerns and contentions. The submission of timely and specific comments can affect a reviewer's ability to participate in subsequent administrative review or judicial review.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the respondent with standing to participate in subsequent administrative review or judicial review.

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SUMMARY OF THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (DEIS)

PROPOSED ACTION

The Sierra National Forest (SNF) proposes the following actions:

1. The prohibition of motor vehicle travel off designated National Forest Transportation System (NFTS) roads, trails and areas by the public except as allowed by permit or other authorization (this prohibition would not apply to snowmobiles). 2. The addition of 40 miles of existing unauthorized routes (with proposed season of use) to the current system of NFTS (National Forest Transportation System) trails and 6 miles to the current system of NFTS roads, and the permanent conversion of 91 miles of NFTS roads to NFTS trails. 3. The addition of one area, totaling 6 acres, where use of motor vehicles by the public would be allowed anywhere within that area. 4. The changing of the allowable use or season of use on approximately 753 miles of existing NFTS roads and prohibiting vehicle use on approximately 204 miles of existing NF Transportation System roads unless allowed by permit or other authorization. And 5; this DEIS proposes a non-significant Forest Plan (LRMP) amendment to designate two trails additions to the NFTS (0.77 miles) within the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class Semi-Primitive, Non-Motorized area as defined in the SNF Forest Plan (LRMP).

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Internal and external scoping identified the following significant issues and these issues were used to develop the action alternatives. The significant issues include the following:

Table 1. List of Significant Issues

Issue Topic	Concern
1. Impacts to Motorized Access	There is concern that the proposed action does not provide adequate motorized access to routes and other recreational use areas and would not provide a sufficient variety of types of motorized recreational experiences. Public comments indicate that motorized access would be closed to areas including dispersed campsites, vistas, picnic areas, off-highway vehicle (OHV) staging and off-loading areas, equestrian parking areas, hang gliding, fishing and rock climbing areas which have been enjoyed by the public for many years. It is perceived that the proposed action does not provide enough opportunities specifically for motorcycles and ATVs or for loops and technical areas (hill climbs, rock crawling, etc.) and this diminishes the variety of recreational experiences the public desires. Some commenters have historic ties to certain locations that would be closed in the proposed action. Some people also voiced concerns that access from their private property onto motorized routes on Forest lands would be closed, which they feel would affect their enjoyment of their property.

Issue Topic	Concern
2. Motorized Use and Ownership Conflicts	There is concern that the number of miles of routes open under the proposed action, as well as the location of some of those routes, would result in conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users and conflicts between different types of motorized users (4X4, ATV, motorcycle). Some members of the public believe that concentrating motorized use on designated routes and areas would cause overcrowding of those areas and this would increase conflicts, leading to an overall degradation of the recreational experience. Some comments indicated that there would be conflicts with private property owners once the use of certain routes near private property increases due to this concentration of users.
3. Impacts to Natural and Cultural Resources	There is concern that the proposed action would result in increased impacts to natural and cultural resources. Edge effects, soil erosion, spread of noxious weeds and crushing of native plants were mentioned as impacts to vegetation. Fragmentation and noise disturbance were cited as impacts to wildlife habitat. Loss of groundcover, soil erosion and sedimentation into streams, especially related to trails crossing streams, were noted to impact water quality and aquatic habitat. Some concerns were expressed for motorized use in specific areas with cultural resource values. Concern was also articulated over impacts to air quality resulting from the operation of ATVs and motorcycles.
4. Impacts to Non-motorized recreational experiences	There is concern that the motorized access allowed in the proposed action would impact both the availability of opportunities and the quality of non-motorized recreation. This was particularly important to hikers, hunters and anglers. Everyone who expressed this concern mentioned the impacts of vehicle noise and trail dust on their experience. Hunters and anglers noted that easy access increases the pressure on fish and wildlife. This can reduce hunting and fishing success and/or the size of the animals present. Anglers were concerned that motorized access into certain areas could result in trail erosion and sedimentation of prime fisheries streams, reducing the viability of the populations found there.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

The SNF developed five alternatives: the no action (Alternative 1), the proposed action (Alternative 2) and three other action alternatives (Alternatives 3, 4 and 5) generated in response to the significant issues listed in Table 1. The five alternatives considered in detail for this analysis are listed in Table 2. Complete details of the alternatives, including project mitigation measures, are found in Chapter 2 (Alternatives) of this document.

Table 2. List of Alternatives Considered in Detail

Alternative 1: No Action Alternative	<p>The no action alternative provides a baseline for comparison. Under the no action alternative, current management consists of managing off-highway use as determined by the Forest Supervisor in April 1977 (Environmental Analysis Report of the Impact of Off-Road Vehicle Use on the Sierra National Forest). This decision was implemented by Forest Order 15-77-3. The plan identified areas where motorized travel was prohibited or motorized travel was restricted to designated routes. These areas are depicted in Figure 1. In this alternative, 660,000 acres of National Forest System lands would remain open to motorized cross-country use. The current National Forest Transportation System (NFTS) of roads is defined under the Sierra National Forest 1998 Road Closure Plan and implemented by Forest Order R5-83-3.</p> <p>No changes would be made to the current NFTS and no cross-country travel prohibition would be put into place. The Travel Management Rule would not be implemented and no Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) would be produced. Motor vehicle travel by the public would not be limited to designated routes, except within areas described in Figure 1. Unauthorized routes would continue to have no status or authorization as NFTS facilities.</p> <p>Key Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Continues prohibition of motorized cross-country travel where motorized travel was prohibited or motorized travel was restricted to designated routesAdds no new NFTS facilitiesAllows motorized cross-country travel in areas on the SNF outside those where motorized travel was prohibited or motorized travel was restricted to designated routes
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<p>Alternative 2: Proposed Action</p>	<p>The proposed action was developed based on Agency knowledge (including route inventory) and public input regarding popular routes for motorized recreation and is comprised of the prohibition of cross-country motorized travel, the proposed additions to the NFTS and the proposed changes to the existing NFTS as described in the NOI published September 11, 2007 (Volume 72, Number 175) with some modifications. Alternative 2 meets the objective of prohibiting cross-country travel. Routes proposed for addition in Alternative 2 contribute to the following variety of riding experience: motorcycle (7 percent), ATV and quads (50 percent) and four-wheel drive (43 percent). The range of motorized recreation difficulty is easy (50 percent), moderate (36 percent) and difficult (13 percent). In some areas, the riding experience is enhanced due to extended riding time with access to loops and a larger network of roads and motorized trails. Motorized access to dispersed recreation is low. Alternative 2 also proposes a non-significant Sierra National Forest Plan (LRMP) amendment to designate two trail additions to the NFTS (0.77 miles) within the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class Semi-Primitive, Non-Motorized area as defined in the LRMP (USDA-FS 1991).</p> <p>Key Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibits cross-country motorized travel Adds 40 miles of NFTS motorized trails (103 routes) Adds 6 miles of NFTS roads (33 roads) Adds 6.1 acres within one use area open to motor vehicle use Changes the season of use on 753 miles of existing NFTS roads (839 segments); as a result of these changes, 1014 miles of existing NFTS roads will have seasonal open Changes vehicle class on 159 miles of existing NFTS roads (58 roads) Prohibits all vehicle use on 204 miles of existing NFTS roads (395 roads) Changes 0 miles of NFTS roads to operate as combined use roads under California State Vehicle Code 38026
<p>Alternative 3</p>	<p>Alternative 3 responds to issues of impacts to natural and cultural resources and impacts to non-motorized recreational experience by prohibiting motorized cross-country travel without adding any additional facilities to the NFTS. Alternative 3 meets the objective of prohibiting cross-country travel. This alternative also provides a baseline for comparing the impacts of other alternatives that propose changes to the NFTS. No changes would be made to the current NFTS.</p> <p>Key Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibits cross-country motorized travel Adds no new NFTS facilities

Alternative 4	<p>Alternative 4 responds to issues of impacts to natural and cultural resources and impacts to non-motorized recreational experience by prohibiting motorized cross-country travel and adding routes and roads in locations that avoid or mitigate for sensitive resources. Alternative 4 meets the objective of prohibiting cross-country travel. Added miles of NFTS roads provide access to dispersed recreation opportunities. Added of miles of NFTS trails contribute to the following variety of riding experience: motorcycle (75 percent), ATV and quads (39 percent) and four-wheel drive (54 percent). The range of motorized recreation difficulty is easy (72 percent), moderate (24 percent) and difficult (4 percent). In some areas the riding experience is enhanced due to extended riding time with access to loops and a larger network of roads and trails. Seasonal and year round road closures are applied where needed for resource protection. Alternative 4 also proposes a non-significant Forest Plan (LRMP) amendment to allow two of the proposed route additions to the NFTS (1.64 miles) to be designated within the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class Semi-Primitive, Non-Motorized area as defined in the LRMP(USDA-FS 1991).</p> <p>Key Actions:</p> <p>Prohibits cross-country motorized travel</p> <p>Adds: 42 miles NFTS motorized trails (96 routes)</p> <p>Adds: 9 miles NFTS roads (43)</p> <p>Adds 37.2 acres within 11 use areas open to motor vehicle use</p> <p>Changes the season of use on 1404 miles of existing NFTS roads (1271 segments); as a result of these changes, 1530 miles of existing NFTS roads will have seasonal open periods</p> <p>Changes vehicle class on 175 miles of existing NFT system roads (76 roads)</p> <p>Prohibits all vehicle use on 268 miles of existing NFTS roads (395 roads)</p> <p>Changes 0 miles of NFTS roads to operate as combined use roads under California State Vehicle Code 38026</p>
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Alternative 5	<p>Alternative 5 responds to issues of impacts to motorized access and motorized use and ownership conflicts. This alternative prohibits cross-country travel and adds facilities (roads, trails and areas) to the NFTS to provide access and recreation opportunity. Alternative 5 meets the objective of prohibiting cross-country travel. Added miles of NFTS roads provide access to dispersed recreation opportunities. Added miles of NFTS trails contribute to the following variety of riding experience: motorcycles (8 percent), ATV and Quads (44 percent) and four-wheel drive (48 percent). The range of motorized recreation difficulty is easy (70 percent), moderate (24 percent) and difficult (4 percent). Seasonal and year round road closures are applied where needed for resource protection.</p> <p>Alternative 5 also proposes a non-significant Forest Plan (LRMP) amendment to designate two trail additions to the NFTS (1.64 miles) within the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class Semi-Primitive, Non-Motorized area as defined in the LRMP (USDA-FS 1991).</p> <p>Key Actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibits cross-country motorized travel Adds: 71 miles NFTS motorized trails (167 routes) Adds: 14 miles NFTS roads (62) Adds 113.1 acres within 20 areas open to motor vehicle use Changes the season of use on 1551 miles of existing NFTS roads (1508 road segments); as a result of these changes, 1600 miles of existing NFTS roads will have seasonal open periods Changes vehicle class on 302 miles of existing NFT system roads (130 roads) Prohibits all vehicle use on 155 miles of existing NFTS roads (368 roads) Changes 47 miles of NFTS roads to operate as combined use roads under California State Vehicle Code 38026
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SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

For a summary of environmental impacts refer to Table 32. Summary Direct and Indirect Effects of the Alternatives on Forest Resources on page 42.